

Romance: A Chronicle of the Adventures of John



Kemp in England and Jamaica----By Joseph Conrad

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CHAPTER IV.

I remained lying there, bound hand and foot, for a long time; for quite long enough to allow me to collect my senses and see that I had been a fool to threaten O'Brien. I had been nobly indignant, and behold! I had a sack thrown over my head for my pains and was put away safely somewhere or other. It seemed to be a cellar.

I was in search of romance, and here were all the elements; Spaniards, a conspirator and a kidnaping; but I couldn't feel a fool and romantic as well. True romance, I suppose, needs a whirl of emotions

splashing, jarring—and it became obvious to me that I was being taken to some ship, the Spanish ship, of course. Suddenly I broke into cold perspiration at the thought that, after all, their purpose must be to drop me quickly overboard. "Carlos!" I cried. I felt the point of a knife on my breast. "Silence, señor!" said a gruff voice.

This fear vanished when we came alongside a ship evidently already under way; but I was handled so roughly and clumsily that I was thoroughly exhausted and out of breath by the time I was got on board. All was still around me; I was left alone on a settee in the main cabin, as I imagined. For a long time I made no movement; then a door opened and shut. There

was a young gentleman was about to become singularly inconvenient, and he is in no way harmed."

He spoke in a velvety voice, and walked away gently through the darkness. Carlos followed with the lantern dangling at arm's length; strangely enough, he had not even looked at me. I suppose he was ashamed, and I was too proud to speak to him, with my hands and feet tied fast. The door closed and I remained sitting in the darkness.

I turned my head to a click; I saw a door open a little way, and the small blue flame of a taper floated into the room. The light shone redly through protecting fingers, and upwards on to a small face,

apart, numb and perfectly useless. I was half aware of pain in them, but it passed unnoticed among a cloud of other emotions. I didn't feel my finger tips because I had the agitation, the flutter, the tantalization of looking at her.

"Ask nothing," she said, hurriedly. "The land is not far yet. You can escape. Carlos thought * * * But no! You would only perish for nothing. Go with God." She pointed imperiously toward the square turnposts of the cabin.

"Go—go—go with God," the girl whispered urgently. "There is a boat—"

I made a motion to rise; I wanted to go. But I could not stand, though the blood was returning, warm and tingling, in my legs and hands. She looked at me with a sharp frown, puckering her brows a little, beat a hasty tattoo with one of her feet and cast a startled glance toward the forward doors that led on deck.

"Your life hangs on a thread," she murmured.

I answered: "You have given it to me. Shall I never—?" I was acutely conscious of the imperfection of my language.

She looked at me sharply; then lowered her lids. Afterwards she raised them again. "Think of yourself. Every moment is—"

"I will be as quick as I can," I said.

"That man thinks he can destroy you. I hate him—I detest him! You have seen how he treats my father."

It struck me, like a blow, that she was merely avenging O'Brien's insolence to her father. I had been kidnaped against Don Balthasar Riego's will. It gave me very well the measure of the old man's powerlessness in face of his intendante—who was obviously confident of afterwards soothing the resentment.

I was glad I had not thanked her for taking an interest in me. I was distressed, too, because once more I had missed Romance by an inch.

Someone kicked at the locked door. A voice cried—I could not help thinking—warningly. "Seraphina! Seraphina!" and another voice said with excessive softness, "Senorita! Voyons! quelle folie."

She sprang at me. Her hand hurt my wrist as she dragged me aft. I scrambled clumsily into the recess of the counter and put my head out. The night air was very chilly and full of brine; a little boat towing by a long painter was sheering about in the phosphorescent wake of the ship. A little astern of us, on our port quarter, a vessel under a press of canvas seemed to stand still; looming up like an immense pale ghost. She might have been coming up with us, or else we had just passed her—I couldn't tell.

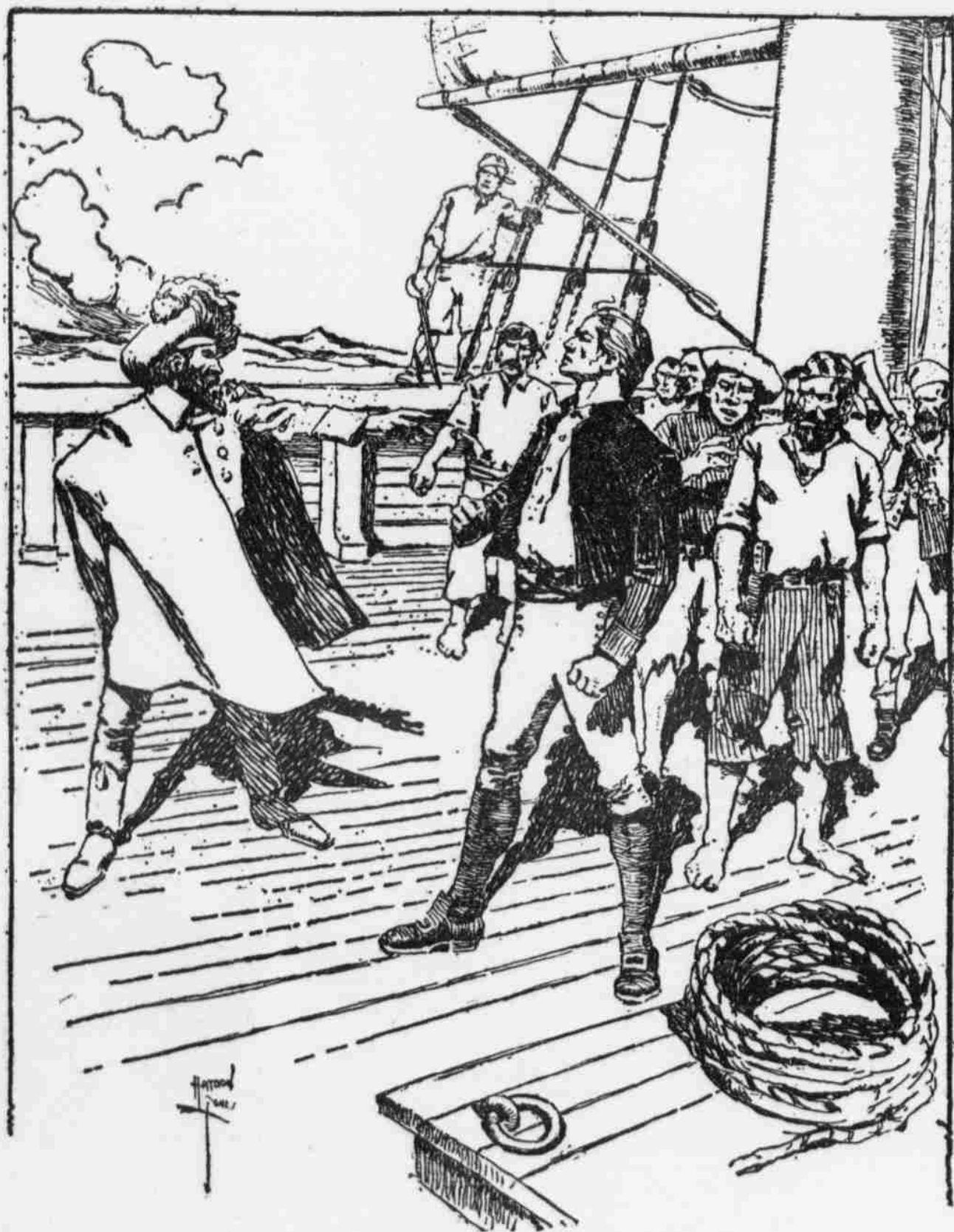
The sound of another kick at the door made me swing myself out, head first, without reflection. I got soused to the waist before I had reached the bows of the boat. With a frantic effort I clambered up and rolled in. When I got on my legs the jerky motion of tossing had ceased, the boat was floating still, and the light of the stern windows was far away already. The girl had cut the painter.

The other vessel was heading straight for me, rather high on the water, broad-beamed, squat and making her way quietly, like a shadow. The land might have been four or five miles away—I had no means of knowing exactly. It looked like a high, black cloud, and purple-gray mists here and there among the peaks hung like scarfs.

I got an oar over the stern to scull, but I was not fit for much exertion. I stared at the ship I had left. Her stern windows glimmered with a slight up-and-down motion; her sails seemed to fall into black confusion against the blaze of the moon; faint cries came to me out of her, and by the alteration of her shape I understood that she was being brought to, preparatory to lowering a boat.

The land breeze was dying away, and in the wake of the moon I perceived the boat of my pursuers coming over, black and distinct; but the other vessel was nearly upon me. I sheered under her starboard bow.

There was a lot of noise on board and none seemed to hear my shouts. Several voices yelled, "That Spanish ship ahead is heaving-to athwart our hawse." The ship forged ahead in the light air; I caught the main chain and scrambled up, while the boat floated away from under my feet. A yell came from forward, "Hard aport!" Then the same voice addressed itself to abusing the Spanish ship very close to us now. "What do you mean by coming-to



SUDDENLY CASTRO, STRETCHING HIS ARM OUT AT ME, CRIED: "COME, HOMBRES, THIS IS THE CABALLERO; SKIZE HIM!"

to extinguish all the senses except that of sight, which it dims. Except for sight, which I hadn't at all, I had the use of them all, and all reported unpleasant things.

I waited, and my fury grew in a dead silence. How would it end—with what outrage? I would show my contempt and preserve my dignity by submitting without a struggle—I despised this odious plot. At last there were voices, footsteps; I found it very hard to carry out my resolution and refrain from stifled cries and kicks. I was lifted up and carried like a corpse, with many stumbles, by men who sometimes growled as they hastened along. From time to time somebody murmured "take care." Then I was deposited into a boat. The world seemed to be swaying,

was a murmured conversation between two voices. This went on in animated whispers for a time. At last I felt as if some one were trying, rather ineffectually, to remove the sack itself. Finally, that actually did rub its way over my head, and something soft and silken began to wipe my eyes with a surprising care, and even tenderness. "This was stupidly done," came a discontented remark; "you do not handle a caballero like this."

"And how else was it to be done, to that kind of caballero?" was the curt retort.

By that time I had blinked my eyes into a condition for remaining open for minute stretches. Two men were bending over me—Carlos and O'Brien himself. The latter said:

"Believe me, your mistake made this

It came to a halt, and I made out the figure of a girl leaning across a table and looking upwards. There was a click of glass, and a great blaze of light created a host of shining things. A large silver lamp she had lighted kept on swinging to the gentle motion of the ship.

She stood just in front of me; the girl that I had seen through the door; the girl I had seen play with the melon-seeds. She was breathing fast—it agitated me to be alone with her—and she had a little shining dagger in her hand.

She cut the rope round my ankles, and motioned me imperiously to turn round.

"Your hands—your hands!"

I turned my back awkwardly to her and felt the grip of small, cool, very firm fingers upon my wrists. My arms fell